
THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED (GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES: RAVENNA ORDNANCE PLANT TRANSCRIPTS OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

interviews conducted by
Rita Walsh
of
GRAY & PAPE, INC.

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**U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND HISTORIC CONTEXT SERIES
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS
NUMBER 7C**



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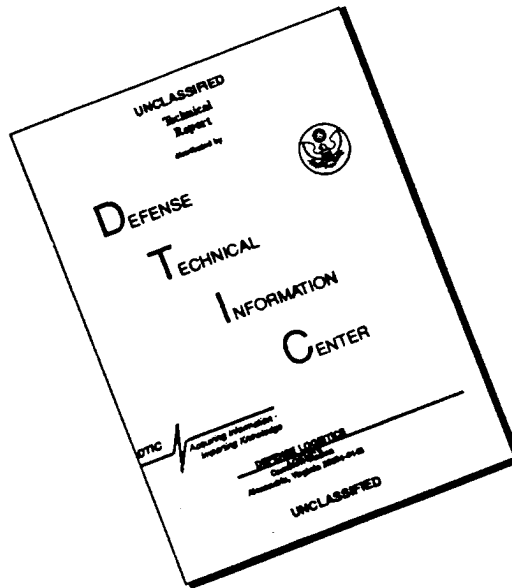
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**THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S
GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:**

**RAVENNA ORDNANCE PLANT
TRANSCRIPTS OF
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

interviews conducted by
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Geo-Marine, Inc.
550 East 15th Street
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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This report contains transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of a project to document the World War II-era construction and operations of the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant (RVAAP), Ravenna, Ohio. The interviews were conducted under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 014; the transcriptions of these interviews were completed under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 89. Both these projects were undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at RVAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments during the World War II period.

All the interviews were conducted by Gray & Pape, Inc. (Gray & Pape), under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc., during the summer and early fall of 1994, and the tapes of these interviews were transcribed by the personnel at Professional Transcription Service, Dallas, Texas. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at Geo-Marine, Inc., served as Principal Investigator.

Rita Walsh, of Gray & Pape, conducted the oral history interviews. Of the 11 subjects interviewed during the course of research for the project, five were recorded on audio tape. These five subjects were Estella Babb Pavlick Decker, Joe DiMauro, Ray McDaniel, Loris Troyer, and Robert Walters. Ms. Decker's family had owned 40 acres of land that the government purchased for the facility, and thus offered insight on the acquisition of property for RVAAP. She later worked at the plant. Mr. DiMauro began his relationship with the facility at the beginning of construction, in January 1941. During World War II operations he worked for Atlas Powder Company, the contractor-operator, as a material handler. After the close of the war, he transferred to a government position, working in storage and transportation. Mr. McDaniel grew up in the Ravenna area after moving there in 1919 as a child. He worked at the facility for about nine months during 1942, joining the Navy in October of that year. He returned to the facility after being discharged in 1945. Mr. Troyer was a journalist working for a Ravenna-area newspaper prior to and during World War II. Robert Walters, along with his wife Gladys, were employed at the facility during World War II. Mr. Walters began working at the plant during construction as a guard. After RVAAP went on line, he became a fire chief until enlisting in the army. Mr. Walters entered the service in June 1942. He returned to the facility in 1945, and again worked for the fire department there.

The contributions provided by these individuals have been invaluable. The time and effort they took to participate in the project is greatly appreciated.

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ESTELLA BABB PAVLICK DECKER

November 1, 1995

Ravenna, Ohio

Rita Walsh, Interviewer

This is Rita Walsh of Gray and Pape of Cincinnati, Ohio, and I am conducting an interview on November 1, 1995, with Estella Babb Pavlick Decker of Ravenna, Ohio, with regard to the history of the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant, and I'm going to ask Mrs. Decker some questions about the plant during its construction phase, as well as the years during World War II. Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

In Charlestown, [inaudible] Road.

And you lived on a farm?

Yes.

How big was the farm?

Sixty acres.

Had you and your family lived there a long time?

All my life at that date.

And when you were living there, your mother was widowed?

Yes.

Did you work or go to school, then?

At that time, I was going to school.

Can you describe the area at that time, right around the plant?

A farming area [inaudible].

Lots of big farms or . . . ?

The Fulton Farm probably is the biggest. Most the others were smaller farms.

And were they dairy farms or . . . ?

Both--dairy and agriculture.

And yours was?

Dairy and agriculture, but it was small.

What did you do besides go to school and help out on the farm?

That was about it. I was involved with athletics at school. That was it.

What was the reaction of people in the community when the government came in offering them money for their land?

Some of them were real upset and alarmed about it. For my family, it was a good thing.

And why is that?

Because my mother was a widow and the farm was more than she could handle.

Did you know what they were going to put on the land when you first started hearing about it?

No.

What did you think it was going to be?

At that time, I didn't [inaudible].

And you say you had been on this farm all your life. Had it been in your family for a long time?

No, when my mother and dad were married, they purchased the farm. That would have been 1920.

And they were residents of Ravenna?

Charlestown.

So they had lived in that area?

Yes.

Did you feel that what the government paid you for the land was a fair price?

Yes.

Did you accept the first offer they made? Do you know?

I think probably my mother did, because the realtor was a [inaudible] man and she didn't dicker with him, as I recall.

You know of anyone who went to court?

Yes. The Strausser family did and there were probably several others, but I know that family did. They got more money. But they had a business [inaudible].

And how long was that court battle? Do you remember it taking a while?

Not [inaudible], I don't think.

Because it went pretty quickly, that purchase of all that land. People were amazed. I think less than a month or so [inaudible]. Did you know if land prices rose as a result of this?

Somewhat, I think.

Do you think most people were paid enough for their land to buy new land that was comparable?

Yes.

And where did your family move to?

Same town, Charlestown, south [inaudible].

And on what road?

New Falls Road.

In a farm about the same size or a lot . . . ?

No, no. Just two acres [inaudible].

And you didn't farm then?

No, just gardened. (Chuckles).

Did you go into Ravenna very much, when the plant was being constructed, during that period, during the winter?

When the plant was being constructed, I was going to business college and I stayed in Ravenna.

And what was that like, [inaudible] on the weekends?

Busy. That road was busy, until they built a new road.

Route 5.

Yes. [Inaudible] what is now known as [inaudible], but it used to be Route 5, but the new road [inaudible] put in.

And that went south, right? [Inaudible] Road, the new road?

Yes.

It skirted the southern boundary of the plant?

Yes. Yes.

You say it was busy, but was it very unlawful, what was going on, did you feel, or just lots and lots of people?

Lots of people that wouldn't . . . in some areas they had problems with [inaudible] more [inaudible] going [inaudible].

Were you boarding with someone?

In town [inaudible].

But you weren't paying . . . obviously you weren't paying an inflated rent or anything, then, if you were working for it?

No. [Inaudible].

A lot of people said that was what happened.

No, it was the school principal [inaudible]. [Inaudible] do that [inaudible] he could help me out. [Inaudible].

Did you sense that people who had lived in Ravenna for a long time got a long with the new people pretty well? Can't think of any instance where . . . ?

Pretty much. Now, there was some . . .

Wait in line.

There was some [inaudible] the plant being built there, but eventually they worked it out.

[Inaudible].

[Inaudible]. It was good for the business.

Do you remember the company newsletter during . . . you weren't working there during the construction phase at all. When did you start working?

They weren't finished, but I started in October of 1942. I think there was still some construction being done, but the biggest portion was done.

And how did you find out about a job?

Through an army officer that went to our church.

And what church was that?

Methodist church [inaudible].

And he was already working at the plant? How was the pay at the plant when you first started there?

It was comparable to . . . probably a little better maybe than the [inaudible] that year.

And when you went to business school, did you see yourself doing office work and what you were doing at the plant?

It's what I learned to do. Yeah. Well, I didn't start to work there till I graduated, well I finished my course and [inaudible]. I started working in October and graduated in December.

So you worked part time?

[Inaudible].

And were you working part time [inaudible]?

No, no.

Just at night?

I'd finished. [Inaudible].

And did you drive out to the plant with someone?

Yeah. I didn't have a car. We shared rides.

How many people were in the car?

Probably five or six. They encouraged the Share the Ride program.

Do you know if, in those early years--and I'm concentrating on the World War II period--did you know if the pay was the same for men and women, or was it different?

At that time, I didn't know.

Do you remember what [inaudible]?

I thought it was. My pay? Yes. Fourteen-forty a year. (Laughs). But it depends on the job. I think the, like the line job, you know, they were classified different classifications than what they hired me for [inaudible] paid.

Do you think the line job paid better?

[Inaudible].

They were dangerous.

[Inaudible]. (Laughs).

When you were working at the plant, you were living out on your mother's farm at that time. Were you back there, then?

When I worked there, I moved back. Right.

So did you come into town very much? Did you notice that people were still getting along pretty well or were kids in the schools, maybe having more freedom and getting a little rowdier? That seems to be the case in a lot of these towns during World War II, where kids in high school or, in some cases, worked out at the plant . . . they worked at certain jobs, and because they had that money and less parental supervision, there was more trouble in the town because of that. Did you [inaudible]?

Of course, where we lived, you didn't have that. There could been some here. I know they used to have some problems out at a trailer park that was on 225.

Was that Newton Falls?

That was in (Paris?) Town.

Was that one of the trailer parks built by [inaudible]?

No. [Inaudible].

What did people do for entertainment? What was around [inaudible]? Was there a movie theater?

Yes. There was a theater. [Inaudible].

And were there sporting events, like organized ball games?

They had a recreation program at the plant and they used the [inaudible] out there [inaudible].

That's right. The federal government paid to have that made into a recreation center.

[Inaudible].

And everyone could go to that center, [inaudible] people who worked in the plant [inaudible]. There was a recreation center at the plant itself, wasn't there?

Yes, yes. Built after the [inaudible]. It wasn't right away, I don't think [inaudible]. They had a good program out there.

[Inaudible]. Do you know of the plant administration trying to get people from the town to get to know everybody? Were there any events like that that you remember, like dances or plays?

We had dances at the rec hall.

And everyone could go? [Inaudible].

Then they had a recreation hall at the community center in Newton Falls a lot of people went to.

[Inaudible]. It was a different [inaudible].

[Inaudible].

What did you think was done at the plant? Did you understand that pretty well when you started working there?

[Inaudible].

Did they give you tours?

At that time, [inaudible], but I had several tours later [inaudible].

Which facility did you work at [inaudible]? What was it called [inaudible].

Headquarters building.

Headquarters building. And that's that large . . .

[Inaudible] building on the hill.

Which floor? Do you remember?

Well, actually I worked second floor, and then later I worked over in the employment building, which is [inaudible], and then down at the guard gate, down in that building I worked for a while, and then [inaudible].

And what was your job?

I did office work [inaudible].

[Inaudible] personnel?

[Inaudible] personnel [inaudible].

When you first came to the plant and you worked for the administration, what exactly did you do, typing reports or . . . ?

[Inaudible].

So you didn't run around the plant a lot [inaudible]?

[Inaudible].

Where did you go to lunch?

Cafeteria.

Every day? How long was your lunch hour? Half-hour. And did you have to wear a uniform?

[Inaudible].

Did anyone in that area ever wear a uniform, because I know . . .

Some of them did.

I saw it in one of the newsletters that they had different styles of uniforms for women to wear, even in the office.

I didn't.

Just didn't like the idea of wearing the same thing every day?

I guess when I was there, they didn't promote it that much. They may have done it [inaudible].

But aren't you glad you didn't have to wear the uniform that the line workers . . . ?

Yes.

And that was like pale brown with [inaudible] I think or something. I think [inaudible] for the women, I think.

[Inaudible] it's attractive, kind of hard to believe. Did you belong to a union?

No.

Just the line workers did. Was the work stressful, that you did?

I didn't think so. Sometimes it got a little . . . we were pushed a little bit, but [inaudible] job. [Inaudible].

Did you work at day shift all . . . ?

Day shift. And some overtime [inaudible].

And what were the hours?

Eight to four-thirty.

[Inaudible]. What did you think about your part in the defense effort?

[Inaudible]. (Laughs). It took a lot of people.

What were the other people working at the plant like? Did you see very many people when you were working at the plant, or did you mainly [inaudible] the people you worked with . . . ?

Mostly what I worked with.

[Inaudible] people your age?

Well, [inaudible]. It was generally [inaudible].

And mostly women?

[Inaudible].

Was there a plant newspaper?

Yes. [Inaudible].

What did they call it?

[Inaudible].

And you got a copy of it?

Yes.

And [inaudible]. Did you notice that the plant was segregated, at least on the line?

That, I didn't notice. I know that the cafeteria had a dining room for the [inaudible].

[Inaudible] a separate area for Black [inaudible]?

[Inaudible].

Do you know where the Black people who worked at the plant lived?

[Inaudible].

They weren't concentrated in one place?

[Inaudible].

Did you notice if there was a high incidence of people being sick at the plant [inaudible] area?

[Inaudible] been around powder [inaudible].

[Inaudible] rashes.

But they had to [inaudible] that [inaudible]. But I never saw anybody who had it.

And did you see people whose hair turned red? I've been told that over and over again, that people's hair would turn red from working [inaudible].

I didn't see it [inaudible].

Would you think the whole Ravenna area changed because of this plant, at least during the war?

I think it did. I think it did.

Was it much quieter before than now . . . ?

Possibly, yes.

More people opening businesses?

Yes.

Did a lot of people get away from farming and go into another business?

[Inaudible], and then they sold their farms [inaudible].

Was there a curfew?

[Inaudible].

Did you have one? Because you were how old [inaudible]?

I may have been 17. I was 19.

[Inaudible]. Did many women work at the plant?

Yes, lots of women.

Both on the line and in the administration building. Did you know very many people who worked on the line, any women?

Not at that time, no. Not in the early days. Later, I knew more, you know, [inaudible].

Would you say most of these women either had worked before or would have been working elsewhere if they hadn't worked at the plant?

No, I think that got a lot of them out. [Inaudible].

Were there labor shortages [inaudible]?

Yes, and they recruited. They send recruiters south [inaudible] people [inaudible].

How far south?

I think they went like to Carolina and Georgia, [inaudible].

Do you know if a lot of those people stayed around after the war?

Well, some did; some went back. Some didn't like it, I mean, you know, constant turnover.

And did you get to know any of them?

Not really.

[Inaudible].

No, [inaudible].

Do you know if that was controversial at all, or was it just acknowledged that there weren't enough people around here because all the men were going in to the service and [inaudible]?

[Inaudible].

Do you know what happened to the people who lost their jobs at the end of the war?

No.

They had such a drastic . . . obviously, you weren't cut.

Yes.

You stayed on.

Well, they kind of moved into the surrounding areas [inaudible] jobs, some of them left the area, some of the executives [inaudible].

And did you think you were going to lose your job or did you feel pretty secure?

Not at that time. At one time, it got pretty close [inaudible].

Right after World War II?

It was even later than that.

[Inaudible]?

M-hm.

How do you think the community changed? [Inaudible] the way that you thought [inaudible], more buildings, more [inaudible], more choices of things to do [inaudible]?

Possibly. It brought money into the community *[inaudible]*.

You think people moved out more, in terms of doing things, like seeing their community as a larger part? What I'm trying to say is if maybe people didn't think of going to Cleveland or Youngstown or something to get things, and now maybe they would [inaudible]?

Yeah, *[inaudible]*, and it developed the area, too.

As far as businesses and housing?

Um-hmm.

Do you think that kind of in a steady going upward [inaudible] or was there a point where it got a little bit quieter.

Well, when they pulled out, it affected us, but then eventually, other businesses were here. Then people traveled. Like some of them went to Cleveland to work, you know, and traveled back and forth. At that time . . .

What about [inaudible]?

[Inaudible], but they used to--now, they don't now--but there used to be a train *[inaudible]*.

Commuter train from Cleveland to the plant?

No, I meant when they reduced the force out there, they . . . this one particular man I think that *[inaudible]*--his name was *[inaudible]*--he got a job working at Defense Contract Administration Services. He commuted back and forth.

Well, I think I'm out of the questions that I have for you, and I thank you very much for doing this interview for a second time with me.

(End of Interview)

JOE DiMAURO
November 2, 1995
Kent, Ohio
Rita Walsh, Interviewer

This is Rita Walsh, of Gray and Pape of Cincinnati, Ohio, and I'm conducting my fifth interview with Joe DiMauro of Kent, Ohio, and he worked during many phases of the plant during the World War II period, beginning with the construction period, and worked for the arsenal and the depot side of the plant. Mr. DiMauro, you told me you were born in Akron.

Yes, I was. I was born in Akron, November 1, 1916.

And this is November 2, 1995. Happy birthday.

Thank you. And from Akron, we moved from Ravenna, where my dad had a celery farm out there, [inaudible] he raised [inaudible], and in 1927, my dad bought a farm in Kent, and again, it was a celery farm [inaudible], which we raised celery, spinach, radishes, cabbages, all types of produce. And I graduated from Kent State High School in 1934, and I went to work for my father-in-law at that time, on [inaudible], again, at a celery farm.

Outside of Kent?

Right near the stadium. Matter fact, Kent State University Stadium bought his land--a million dollars--before they built the stadium there. And I worked for him until January 5, 1941, when I went to work at the arsenal. And in August of 1940, when the farmers sold their land at the arsenal, I helped get a lot of the hay, straw and grain out of there, which my father-in-law had bought, because he had a big dairy, and so we hauled a lot of that material out of there, which he bought off the farmers for his cattle.

And it was during that month that the owners had to get everything out of there?

The folks were given a month to vacate so the survey and construction could begin.

How do you think a lot of them felt about the situation?

They didn't seem to mind it. What few farmers I talked to at the time, going there to get their grain and [inaudible] didn't seem to mind it too much.

Were they feeling patriotic, did you feel?

Yes, I think they were. Yes.

And what did you do after that? They started January 1, 1941.

Well, January 1, 1941, right on New Year's Day, I went out there and I got a job as a laborer, and I went to work with a plow [inaudible], and the plow drivers, they drove [inaudible] under very old [inaudible] quicksand, and they drove [inaudible] under a lot of the warehouses. And some of the warehouses out there have [inaudible] 60 feet deep, steel beams that were driven down to support the buildings.

Because of the quicksand?

Because of the land, the terrain which was [inaudible] they had a giant [inaudible] that deep.

Did you have to [inaudible] at the [inaudible]?

At that time, no. But during construction, they had built this campsite, where they got in all the trucks and vehicles they hauled people out to work, and also they had a big campsite parking area for people that drove their car. And they also had a train, passenger train, one that run from Youngstown to the arsenal, one from Akron [inaudible], that picked up people that worked there, and the train stayed there all day and then people loaded up again and [inaudible] back home.

But were there three shifts of construction?

Construction around the clock, yes. The train only worked the day shift. And during that time, on March 17, I believe it was, 1941, a passenger train coming in from Youngstown, crossing over to go into the arsenal, was hit by a freight train going east, and I don't know if anybody was killed or how many was hurt.

[Inaudible] people were killed.

See, I never knew that. They sort of kept that quiet.

Yeah, Loris Troyer was telling me a story about being there on the scene.

And that was the worst winter day we had. You couldn't see ten feet ahead of you. Matter fact, at that time, after I got off a [inaudible] crew, it was pretty well down to where there was only one plow driving crew. I went to work [inaudible], and I was pumping water out of [inaudible] so that the [inaudible] could go ahead and [inaudible].

And you think it was the spring of '41?

Well, no that was in . . . early, well, yeah, early spring, but this was March 17, [inaudible] at that time.

What did you get paid? Do you remember?

To begin with, 65 cents an hour, and they went on strike and [inaudible], who was the man in charge of construction out there, he got up on the [inaudible] out there in the parking area, where the [inaudible] was, and said, "Please, fellows, go to work. I'll try to get you a nickel raise." Well, of course, like everybody else, everybody listened to a few, and boo, boo, boo, and they were on strike for one week. Went back to work [inaudible] later, and got a nickel raise out of it. Of course, I was thinking that raise was on the labor side. Now, how much the trades got, I don't know.

And did you get subsequent raises after that, during the construction period, or was that the only one?

That was the only one that I ever got, and [inaudible] September of 1941, I transferred from [inaudible] to [inaudible]. At that time, [inaudible] more people into their operation, and they took over . . . after I [inaudible], I went to the [inaudible] as a gandy dancer [inaudible].

Tell me what a gandy dancer is.

It's a man that works on the railroad lining up railroad tracks and placing [inaudible] under the ties, after you raise the tracks and you line it up, and this . . . I transferred in from [inaudible], because they took over what was a classification [inaudible].

Did that mean another raise?

At that time, I started at 75 cents an hour, and I worked as a gandy dancer in, you know, February of 1942, and I went to . . . the same division that had the railroad operation under it was also the material handling [inaudible]. So I transferred over from the railroad to material handling, unloading all the material coming in.

All material?

Empty shells, empty [inaudible] casing, and TNT, all the explosives of that type that was coming in for production. See, that was [inaudible] took over the first [inaudible], and August 15, 1941, and that's in 75 millimeter shell, and then as the construction people, their load line was completed, Atlas Powder would take over the [inaudible]. And as I said in my review, by December of 1941, [inaudible] had completed construction pretty well, although there was always work going on. But the major work was completed by the end of 1940, and that included [inaudible] 1, 2, 3 and 4, and the [inaudible], which had seven production lines. And then those seven production lines, they . . . fuse, boosters, [inaudible], percussion elements and when this was complete, that went into finished ammunition.

Where were you living during this period, during that year?

At that time, I lived where the stadium is right now.

And how did you get out to the plant?

I rode with three other fellows that were working during construction days, and later on, I had a car of my own, and I had five passengers plus myself [inaudible] at work. I'd go into Kent, pick up my passengers, and drove to work.

And were you always on the same shift, then?

I worked pretty well on the same shift. And at one time, during a special job that they wanted to get a bunch of ammunition boxed for overseas, they transferred me to the midnight shift, and I took over that operation for about three months. Then I went back on day shift. I became . . . in February, 1922, after I transferred over to material handling, I went to work at load line 3, which was the bomb line. And [inaudible] bombs, I went to work on that line as a working supervisor, and about two months later, I was moved up [inaudible]. And I stayed on that line and I had three shifts doing the loading of the bombs, as they came off the line, off production, and loaded right in the box, commercial box cars and shipped them off. We had orders to ship to a certain destination, but we didn't know where it was going after that. And I used to set up the other two shifts, as to what car they had to load and so on and so forth, and then on the day shift, I'd be back to work. I'd go in pretty early, so I could see what that third shift had completed.

And how old were you at this time?

I was [inaudible]. I was 22 years old.

Did they send you any place for training, or did you have training . . . ?

No, they didn't. I got all my training right there. [Inaudible], as laborers on loading material coming in, all by hand. Didn't have no [inaudible]. Everything was done by hand, and in 1943 is when we got our first Hi-Lift [inaudible].

The Hi-Lift is a forklift?

Forklift [inaudible]. But prior to that, all done by hand.

Did you find this very challenging, being in charge of all these people [inaudible]?

At one time, I had, before I went into the load line, I had a crew of 17 men unloading TNT. There were 2,000 boxes of TNT in a (car?), and we unloaded two cars a day into a [inaudible]. [Inaudible] 17 men.

Did you stop for lunch? Did you stop for any breaks?

At that time, you had no break. We didn't have any break. We'd stop for lunch and then at lunch time, you went out [inaudible] area, and they had what we called a [inaudible], where the [inaudible] could smoke and eat lunch and then go right back to work.

That wasn't a change house was it?

No, no. The change house was only on the load line. We didn't have change houses.

And were those igloos on the arsenal side or the depot side?

They were on the arsenal side, on the plant side.

When you were living around here during that period, in the early part of it, do you remember what this area was like? What did it look like? Was it still mostly farm land out in this direction?

Around here, yes. Matter fact, it was farm land, and the city of Kent, which is where the university is, or [inaudible], not when the University [inaudible], because at that time, the university only consisted of about I think 15 buildings. And [Inaudible] Street was only a two lane highway and very narrow, up and down and curves.

That was the road out to the plant, as well? I mean that type of road.

Yeah. I used to drive up [Inaudible] Street, down Lakewood, to Route 5, at [inaudible], and then on into Ravenna, to Cotton Corners, which is now Cotton Park, and Old Charleston Road, and we'd go by the Hannah Farm, and on to the arsenal.

How long did it take?

It would take about a half-hour. It went 13 miles from my house to the parking area.

And when it snowed, [inaudible], right?

Seven days a week.

Seven days a week?

Seven days a week.

Always seven days a week? Never had a day off?

When I was in . . . when I became a foreman, I went on salary. I didn't like it, and I told him, but they [inaudible] foreman, and my men made more money than I did, because they worked seven days, and they got paid overtime. My salary was set.

What were all the new people coming into the area, what were they like? Did you meet many of them?

No. I'd say in the lifetime of the arsenal, I might have had 2,000 different people [inaudible]. They came from all over. They came in from the south, where they didn't even know how to spell their own name, and you had all types. You had mean ones and there was nice ones. (Laughs)

So you were in materials handling in 1943. What did you do after that?

I stayed right in material handling, which is [inaudible], and I stayed in material handling all the way through Atlas Powder. Atlas Powder pulled out of there in November of 1945, and I transferred over to the government. [Inaudible] of the plant [inaudible]. We got a lot of the material back from overseas. We unloaded it, temporarily, even out in the open. And then that material was inspected and put the material in permanent storage, and the material that didn't pass inspection was de-[inaudible], torn apart, melted off the explosives, then the empty shells [inaudible] so that they still could be sold, and this went on till March or April of 1951. Firestone, the government at that time, well, in that period of time, the government decided to put the ammunition plant under contract, so that they couldn't say that the government had been spending too much money. And so Firestone [inaudible] and Rubber Company took over the Ravenna arsenal in April, '51. And at that time, well, they started setting up for the Korean War, and during [inaudible], we had approximately 17,000 people working out there, and of course, at the end of the war, they had a great lay off, and when [inaudible] came in there, they started building up for Korea and they hired [inaudible] to load shells and one thing or another, and in 1957, the plant went down again. The load lines were put on what we call standby. All the equipment was moth-balled and put away and . . .

What was your job during that period, between 1951 and 1957?

In 1951 and '57, I was the department manager. I moved up the line.

Which department?

Still in storage. Stayed in storage all the way through. And I never changed out of . . . [inaudible]. . . well, I became department foreman or department manager, general foreman, and in 1967, I became a [inaudible] manager, in charge of storage and transportation. At that time, I had transportation [inaudible], and at that point, like I say, in '57, there was quite a lay-off again, and we ended up [inaudible] oh, approximately 1,000 employees out there, and again, [inaudible] inspected the bombs and [inaudible] got a lot of bombs [inaudible] always to store it out in the open, and the shells the same way. We kept on inspecting shells and the good ones were stored [inaudible], and the bombs, if they passed inspection [inaudible]. And this went on till '67. And we started building up again for Vietnam. And then again we hired a few people. We [inaudible] up to about, oh, I'd say 35 to 4,000 people. And we didn't open up the [inaudible]. But at that time, when we started making [inaudible], also. That was the [inaudible] of our load line 1. [Inaudible] up quite a few . . . well, that was the production [inaudible], and we loaded shells [inaudible]. We loaded 76s, we loaded 155, 12.5, 80s, and 240s. That was the shells that we loaded.

I'm going to jump back to World War II. What did people do for entertainment around here, during that period?

Worked. At the arsenal [inaudible], they had a baseball team set up, they had bowling. They had a place where you could bowl up there. They used to have dances out there, [inaudible].

And this was all in your off hours, right?

Yeah.

It wasn't just meant for people who lived on the . . . ?

No. Actually, I [inaudible] that many people living there. In the stack houses, it was mostly your top echelon that lived there, mostly the army personnel that was stationed out there at that time, and there was quite a few of them. Each division had two or three army people over it, at that time. And I know that [inaudible], and I had a chance to move out there during the government days. But you had to go out of the plant to even buy a loaf of bread, and I refused to move. Even at that time, [inaudible]. I could [inaudible] here, and by that time, they had [inaudible], so I could drive the 13 miles in 20 minutes. I said why do I want to move out here when I can drive out here in 20 minutes? I've got to go out of here to buy anything.

Was one of the differences rent? Would you have to pay rent out there?

Yes, but it was very minimal. Yeah, [inaudible].

What was Kent like during that time, the town of Kent? Did that change a lot?

Well, Kent didn't change much. Now, the reason for that, they had built quite a few apartments in Windham for the workers that worked with the arsenal, and that's where the bulk of them lived.

Mostly people who came from out of town, you think, lived there?

Yeah, lived there. Yeah. And then like at the end of World War II, they were there, and in Ravenna, there was quite a few people lived there. And matter fact, at one time, they had quite a few right out side of Cotton Corners, [inaudible] after World War II.

[Inaudible] after World War II?

[Inaudible]. Matter fact, after World War II, they tore down a lot of the campsite dormitories that were still . . . [inaudible] torn down, and [inaudible].

During the World War II period, I understand there were still a lot of old farm houses left within the [inaudible].

Yes.

Do you remember?

Some of the farm houses still had a few people living. That is people that . . . maybe General Foremen or something like that, living in there, and if there was anybody that had lived there prior to selling it, he was allowed to live there, as long as he worked at the arsenal.

Do you know of any people who did that?

I remember one in particular here [inaudible], [inaudible] foreman. And he lived there. At the time, he stayed out there.

Did he get to just stay in the house; he didn't get to farm the land or anything like that?

Oh, no. No. [Inaudible]. Of course, he had [inaudible].

[Inaudible].

No. But later on, Kenley, from Kenley Players, and Tab Hunter and--gee, I [inaudible]--Hugh Downs, they rented the Ethel area for cattle. And they had 5, 6,000 head of cattle out there that they were grazing.

When was that? After World War II?

Yeah, after World War II. And it was good, because it kept all the underbrush down. You see, the way that area, the storage area, was [inaudible] with all the depot area that they leased [inaudible], the storage area, it was 300 feet from one wing to another and [inaudible] it's 300 feet, igloo to igloo, and then there had to be a space before there was another whole area, so that there was never . . . here's two igloos and the next row had an igloo here, between the two. So that if one blew, it wouldn't affect the other one. And [inaudible] in 1943, back when there was still a depot and the plant side, an igloo blew at the depot side. That was one of those cluster bombs. These cluster bombs, I think there were 50 in a box, [inaudible] bombs, and when it blew up, there was a crew of 12 people working there, and the biggest thing they found was two [inaudible] off the (semi?).

I heard it blew all the way to Windham, parts of that truck.

At that time, I had crews loading ammunition about, oh, I'm going to say two to three thousand feet away, and a big chunk of concrete [inaudible] was shot, we estimated, [inaudible] 350, 400 pounds blew clear over between two people where my men were working.

What happened when you heard the explosion? Did you stop work?

No, it happened right at 12:00, and I was just . . . and I was clear over on the plant side, and I was just going into my office, at the time, which was a change house, where people [inaudible] in there and came in the [inaudible], and the doors of that change house opened and closed from the percussion. [Inaudible] show you how far, and this was about a good two miles away.

When did you hear the news? That same day?

Well, right away we started inquiring as to what happened. Just like all black outs, you didn't hear much of what went on the plant side, I mean on the depot side. But later on that evening, I heard that there was an igloo had blown and 12 people killed.

Did you know any of the people?

I knew the foreman on the job. He had been working on one of my crews and transferred over there to take over the job as a foreman. [Inaudible] was killed.

It was just that they were very [inaudible]?

Yeah. What happened, somebody might have got careless [inaudible].

There were set ways of doing everything, then, out there.

Right. You [inaudible], and that's stressed very clearly.

Did most people abide by that?

Oh, yeah. We always . . . [inaudible] have campaigns there, so many man-hours worked without any injury and [inaudible].

Now that was relatively free of injury, that I read?

Yeah. [Inaudible] billboards in different locations, where the men came in and popped in and popped out, and they could [inaudible]. But the men I was working with [inaudible].

Did you get a sense, when you were working there during World War II, of everyone working for the same . . . I mean you were a part of a much, much bigger effort?

Yes.

And most people felt that way?

Ah-huh.

Even though you didn't get to see very many people from the plant, did you, really? It sounded like you sort of tunneled to one area, where you stayed all day, and then you left.

Oh, not necessarily. See, in the storage area, I covered the whole plant, especially after we became [inaudible]. They tore . . . we took over the depot, [inaudible] storage area covered everything from the depot line to the tank plant, which was a major tank plant on the east side. And I covered the storage area, [inaudible], with my men. And later on, in 1967, I took over the storage from one end of the arsenal to the other, which was 11 [inaudible] and 11 miles east and west, and [inaudible].

I'm going to ask a question, and maybe you'll remember. Do you know what it sounded like there, during the day? Was it always very noisy or was it sort of a . . . ?

Oh, no. No, no. These folks on the load line had their own operation and the only thing you could hear, maybe the diesel engine moving the cars around, and that was it. You hardly ever [inaudible]. [Inaudible] right there when [inaudible] work or they were handling something.

[Inaudible]?

No.

And they didn't talk very much to each other while they worked during the day?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, they were all talking.

But there was no music or anything like that?

Oh, no. No, they didn't allow that. And [inaudible].

[Inaudible]?

[Inaudible] even in [inaudible] matches. Couple of guys would come along and shake you down, make sure you didn't have any matches on you.

How did you feel about being finger printed, when that started happening?

No problem.

You said that in November, 1945, when the plant shut down, there were a lot of lay-offs. How did a lot of people feel about that?

Well, [inaudible] because quite a few people were laid off at one time, and [inaudible] people [inaudible] very lucky.

Did you work with a lot of women in your department?

No. No, I didn't. See, the women were mostly [inaudible]. The men were practically all [inaudible]. There was a long table for these [inaudible] up there, and the women were sitting side-by-side on both sides of the table, assembling these different components and making up one [inaudible] that they were working with.

So but it had maybe a few women working in [inaudible]?

Checkers. Only checkers.

What were they checking.

They were checking the material coming into the plant. And then we had . . . like with [inaudible] when we hadn't sent anything to the load line, they'd go to the [inaudible], and, of course, [inaudible], they stayed with the crew that was loading or unloading and checked the material going into the load line and making up the paperwork and it would go right in the box following the material. And the material coming in, of course, there would be some lady in the car, and they would check what was coming in. And that was done by women.

And were the people in general, were they in their 20s, 30s, or were they all ages?

All ages. All ages.

Even people in high school? Do you remember?

Matter fact, we hired kids in high school to work in [inaudible] area [inaudible]. It had nothing but empty shells and [inaudible] back up. They were not allowed to work in explosive areas.

Did you buy war bonds?

Oh, yeah. [Inaudible].

And did you go to the Army/Navy "E" Award that they had out at the plant?

Oh, yeah. [Inaudible]. We had also set up a truck, a flat bed truck, with all the special type of shells and bombs, and we'd go in the parade in town.

Oh, really?

Oh, yeah.

Into Ravenna?

Into Ravenna or Youngstown or Akron, where they had the parades.

[Inaudible].

Of course, they were inert; they weren't loaded. But by looking at it, you couldn't tell it was an empty casing or a loaded bomb or what.

And people lined the streets to see [inaudible]?

Oh, yeah. [Inaudible].

But, in general, those people had a family member working out at the plant?

Oh, yeah. As a matter fact, [inaudible], there was quite a few there that had . . . well, there weren't too many of them worked there, but had family that worked there, father, mother and brother, somebody that had worked there. And a few of them had lived there before their [inaudible] were sold.

What were their names?

Well, in this one case, Harry Williams. He had two daughters. There was 13 in that family I understand, and two of the women were at this [inaudible], and [inaudible] says that their father, when they were asked how many had lived there, they [inaudible]. And their father was carried away. I knew him, and that's how he got [inaudible].

Think we're done. Thank you, Mr. DiMauro.

Oh, you're welcome.

Now we're going to do the spelling of certain names. We're going to start with Mr. DiMauro's last name.

DiMauro is capital D-i, capital M-a-u-r-o.

Colonel Chavins?

Chavins is spelled C-H-A-V-I-N-S.

And the Kenley Player?

That was K-E-N-L-E-Y.

That was it. Thank you.

(End of Interview)

RAY McDANIEL
CHARLENE McDANIEL
November 2, 1995
Windham, Ohio
Rita Walsh, Interviewer

This is Rita Walsh of Gray and Pape in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I am in Windham, Ohio, interviewing Ray and Charlene McDaniel. Both worked at the plant during the World War II period, and I'm going to be asking them a series of questions that relate to the history of the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant. Mr. McDaniel, if you could tell me again a little bit about your background, when you first came to this area and when you worked at the plant.

R. McD: Well, I came to the area in 1919 and I was in the area until . . . well, (chuckles), still. Graduated from Windham High School in 1937, went to work for Republic Steel for five years.

And that was in Newton Falls?

R. McD: No. Republic Steel in Warren, and left Republic Steel and went to the arsenal in February of 1942 and worked there until October of that year. I joined the Navy between working low line one production and the guard force in Port O' Jordan's Depot from July to October of that year, and returned to the arsenal in 1945 till 1984. The later years were spent either in maintenance or engineering. [Inaudible] inspector (no right?) or a foreman for 12 years, IPE equipment in engineering.

Mrs. McDaniel, where did you work?

C. McD: I started out at [inaudible], which [inaudible] personnel office [inaudible], general storage person.

What years were you there?

C. McD: Fifty-three to [inaudible].

Now I'm going to ask you some questions that I have. Where were you living when you heard that the plant was going to be built? Were you right in Windham [inaudible]?

R. McD: I was living on 303, just about a quarter of a mile from where we're at right now.

And you say you had just move here, though, in 1919, right? You came from Illinois?

R. McD: Yeah, I was born in 1918. So I was only a year old. (Laughs). Yes. Yes. And I've lived in this immediate area ever since. The last 76 years.

Can you describe the area at that time?

R. McD: It was rural farm area. The basic area and the township hasn't changed that much. The village changed with the building of the housing development for the arsenal employees and, of course, the change within the plant, like North [inaudible] Pond used to be a six to eight acre pond, just north of us inside the plant, where we swam and did whatever and in the construction, it's [inaudible] to where it's just a creek now. There's no pond left. The boy scout area was a scout camp at the time, where we used to go [inaudible]. Also on Wadsworth Road was Eufford's Peach Orchard, where a lot of people worked picking

strawberries and fruit for the orchard people at the time. And basic, other than that, it's more or less the same, the general area.

What was your family doing there? Were they farming?

R. McD: My father come out as a farmer, from Illinois, and worked at steel till his death in '27, and basically, people were farmers, truck drivers, a lot of them worked at Fulson Steel Mills, making steel, other industrial area plants around.

What was the reaction in this area when people started hearing about the plant being purchased by the government?

R. McD: I think it's the same as it was with West Branch. There was some for it and others against it. I know some of the . . . well, from looking at old records, some of the farms went for low prices, which they weren't that high to start with. Paul's, I think, Strausser's, [inaudible] farms, people that were making a living, a good living at the time, got decent prices for their land, and the others took market value or less, probably.

Because they weren't doing that well?

R. McD: Yeah.

Do you know if anyone's feelings changed when they found out what it was going to be used for, because I know at first, people didn't know what it was going to be?

R. McD: As far as I know, I didn't meet people that voiced much opinion one way or the other. I don't go . . . [inaudible] organized opposition as there's [inaudible] other projects in the area since.

And none of your family planned [inaudible], right?

R. McD: No.

Do you think land prices in the area rose as a result of the government [inaudible]?

R. McD: At that time, no, because a lot of property was still being acquired by . . . like the farm next to me, here, was acquired for \$3,000, for back taxes and stuff like that. So people that had money were acquiring land through tax acquisitions and the general value of farm land as farm land was not that great. Most of the people lived on the farm and worked somewhere else.

Are you from this area?

C. McD: No. I'm from Pennsylvania.

Where in Pennsylvania?

C. McD: [Inaudible].

And why did you come here?

C. McD: We came out to . . . my mom and dad came out with my sister and I, and I went to [inaudible].

Did your parents come here to work at the plant, or . . .

C. McD: No, my dad worked at the . . .

R. McD: *[Inaudible]*.

C. McD: No, over at *[inaudible]* town.

R. McD: Oh, okay.

C. McD: First, and then he went to *[inaudible]*.

R. McD: There was a supply depot and *[inaudible]* operated it *[inaudible]*.

And he didn't work in construction on this plant?

R. McD: No.

You were still working at Republic?

R. McD: When I worked at the plant, I started on production load line 175.

[Inaudible].

R. McD: Millimeter.

You remember what month and year that was?

R. McD: February 12, 1942.

And what did you do on line 1 . . .

R. McD: Mostly I drilled TNT in *[inaudible]*.

[Inaudible].

R. McD: Well, it's the middle one. It's the first one north of the *[inaudible]* towers, 4, 4A, *[inaudible]* towers.

And what did you get paid? Do you remember what your pay was?

R. McD: Started at 95 cents an hour and went to \$1.05.

When?

R. McD: Ninety cents an hour.

I'm going to jump back just a little bit. During the construction era, were there a lot of construction workers who lived in this area? What were they like?

R. McD: Construction workers had a large . . . I was working at Republic at the time, still living here. But construction workers were brought in by rail cars, by commuter trains from Youngstown, Pittsburgh,

Cleveland--I don't know about Cleveland--but Akron. They had a large union hall at [inaudible], what is now 225. A lot of the farmers, local farmers, paid their \$75 and got hired as carpenters with no skill at all, and most of them people went through [inaudible], with the unions buying union cards, but a lot of the local farmers . . . in fact, an uncle of mine and other friends remained on as carpenters. For others, they would keep them on for a month or so and let them go and hire the next person that come up with \$75. But a lot of the old farmers that did hire on as carpenters, [inaudible] carpenters, stayed on. In fact, Art Swesn, the one that I mentioned, an uncle of mine, retired from there, in Firestone [inaudible]. Went from there to a car blocker [inaudible] carpenter, and stayed with production in the plant to retirement.

Were there a lot of construction workers . . . the ones that didn't commute by train, were they boarding in houses around here? Do you remember that . . . ?

R. McD: Possibly. I'm not that familiar with . . .

So your family didn't board anybody?

R. McD: Uh-uh. Then, of course, they were building the Windham housing, the housing at Ravenna, the Cotton Corners and they had Newton Falls and we had barracks in the recreational area, the headquarters area that we tore down [inaudible] . . .

What did the Cotton Corners [inaudible]?

R. McD: Basically the same as Windham's. The basic type building was . . .

A long, rectangular building?

R. McD: Right.

It's hard to miss those when you go through.

R. McD: But they were tore down earlier. They were tore down, in fact, I think even before the war ended, because when construction ended a lot of that . . . And then the [inaudible] went from cost plus to fix fee the . . . the whole thing [inaudible] out and the employment went way down. It didn't effect production. It effected the number of employees.

[Inaudible]?

R. McD: I'm not sure. It was in the mid-'40s somewhere. Mid-'40s.

I'm going to jump back to the production era. How did you hear about the job? How did you apply for it?

R. McD: Well, I lived here. I mean it was . . . there was no [inaudible]. Everybody knew what was going on, and the reason I came is the fact that Republic Steel, I worked on tonnage, could not get scrap because it was allocated and they had to take the government orders prior to it, and we were down to working two and three days a week, and it was a matter of economics to make a move. So the arsenal was available to anybody that wanted a job. [Inaudible] would work, so [inaudible].

How did you get here? Did you drive, share a ride with someone?

R. McD: No, drove myself. People rode with me at different times, but mainly, I drove by myself.

Pretty short ride, wasn't it? Which gate did you go in?

R. McD: Part of the time, I was married and lived in--to my first wife--and lived in Ravenna, and came in the Newton Falls gate. That was when I moved over to Depot. When I worked at the load line, I went in the Paris gate, lower gate [inaudible].

I'm going to ask a really broad question. When you were working on load line 1, what was your day like? What did you do, as far as every day? You drove in, had to go to a certain parking area.

R. McD: Well, everybody parked at the same basic area . . . well, no. Load line 1 had two areas--one in the back for the women that went to 14, in the powder, which I didn't work, but the main people were parked in the front parking area, on the west side of the load line, and you went through the change house procedure, changed clothes, put on uniform, if you drilled, as I did, you were two hours on, two hours off, and you changed to do some other job, and then come back two hours on. And we would average ten shells a minute or 60 trays an hour, which 600 shells an hour. The average . . .

Were you in the same building when you were in the two hours off?

R. McD: Oh, yeah. You just go from the drilling bay to the boosting or setting set screws or staking set screws or something else, in that part of the assembly before it went up to [inaudible] final assembly. Then on the weekends, two out of three weekends, we worked clean up. [Inaudible] part of the company done a complete scrub down from the roof to the floor of all buildings [inaudible]. They were [inaudible] seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Firestone didn't, and Atlas [inaudible] did. They done a complete . . . they went out of production for 24 hours for a complete clean up. Every third week, you would get out of the clean up. You'd get a day off, and that was continuous.

[Inaudible] different shifts, like the day . . .

R. McD: There was three shifts, no, but I worked one shift. Worked all day shift.

What was the uniform like? What color was it?

R. McD: A white beige, orange, because of the TNT it turned the color orange, a coverall type, it was one piece. Coverall.

And your safety shoes?

R. McD: Safety shoes.

Everything on here? Safety glasses?

R. McD: They furnished . . . the people that drilled had safety glasses. It was mandatory they use them, and the drill was . . . lay the shell down, pull the handle in, rotating drill would then cut the TNT, you'd pull a vacuum off your uniform and put it in, vacuum it out [inaudible]. Just continuous. Pick up the next one, do the same thing. And the TNT dust [inaudible] collector outside the building.

You said that you had TNT poisoning. Did that start with a rash?

R. McD: No, I got it inhaling it, swallowing it in the stomach. And it was all the weight loss and the [inaudible]. It took me five weeks. I did nothing but report to work, hang around the change house, until the symptoms went away and [inaudible] I contacted a friend of mine at the Depot, Gerald Rueben, and said

Gerald, I want a job outside for the rest of the summer. I don't want to go back to drilling TNT again. So he got me transferred and I went on the security department over there.

Did they give you milk? Because I understand that workers who worked on the load line with TNT were given milk to drink every day. You remember that?

R. McD: Ah, no, that I don't. That doesn't [inaudible].

Besides Republic Steel, this was your first big job with such a large company. What did you think about that? Sort of felt like you were just in that one building, because you didn't really get to go around the other areas.

R. McD: No, it didn't bother me. [Inaudible]. It was a job, (chuckles).

Did you go to the cafeteria for lunch?

R. McD: They had no cafeteria at the time. I went to the change house. You didn't eat on the line. You went to the change house. We carried our own lunch mainly. They had vendor food available, but I didn't ever eat . . . I carried a lunch.

How soon after you started working here did you start feeling [inaudible]?

R. McD: Well, from February till July, probably April to June, the five weeks period there before I went to the Depot [inaudible]. So [inaudible]. But your hands had mercury with a white steering wheel . . . the steering wheel turns orange. Well, it's nitrate. It's not that . . .

It's not glowing?

R. McD: Yeah, so it's the nitrate out of the TNT . . . well, the amitol, which you're talking about is a mixture of TNT and ammonium nitrate.

I heard that the TNT would turn women's hair red.

R. McD: Again, it was a combination. The nitrate and the amitol could have done it as well as . . . yes, it turned people's hair red. Like I said, the steering wheel in the car turned red from the residue on your hands.

But you took a shower when you left, right?

R. McD: Oh, yeah. It was mandatory you took a shower. You never wore street clothes into the plant. Just to the change house and [inaudible].

Did you work with women? [Inaudible].

R. McD: Women worked in the . . . not in this part of production, no, not at that time. We had some. Some of them worked in [inaudible]. They had divisions in the upper part of the change houses for women and for men, which were totally separate, as far as changing clothes and lockers, what have you. But now 14, CA14, which they called the back line, is where they put the powder, primed the case, put the powder in, and they sent it over to 13, and the women weighed the powder and [inaudible] igniter bags and all this in 14, and that was almost entirely women over there. There was some men worked over there, but it was mainly women.

What kind of training did you have?

R. McD: Nothing. You just went into the job and they showed you what to do and you did it.

What were other people, who were working at the plant . . . you said there weren't very many women where you worked, mostly local people or were there a lot of new people at that [inaudible]?

R. McD: Of course, well a lot of the people then were new. Of course, the fuse and booster areas, the small lines, were almost exclusively women, [inaudible] areas, percussion element and that, because the size of the work.

[Inaudible] small hands.

R. McD: Yeah, and they working . . . that type of work . . .

C. McD: Too monotonous for men.

R. McD: Too monotonous for men, yes. I mean you inspect 250,000 primers going by, little tiny things the size of B.B.'s, it gets whatever.

Did you find the work stressful?

R. McD: No. Other than I had that . . . then, I wasn't really that sick, but they checked you regular at that point, and [inaudible].

Do you remember a lot of people getting sick?

I remember several people that drilled shells getting TNT poisoning, people getting rashes, I guess, but nothing life threatening.

Sounds like women were more susceptible to rashes.

R. McD: Yeah.

[Inaudible]?

R. McD: Not at that time, I don't think. Later on, yes. With Firestone, yes. But I don't remember whether we was or not. It's not part of my recollection. But I don't remember a union at that point. I know the construction people had unions, because the unions ripped them off, as far as I'm concerned. Like I said, getting their cards and then letting them go and hiring more people just to get the initiation fee. [Inaudible]. That was a separate deal.

Did you participate in many of the activities that the plant had, the sports activities and the dances?

R. McD: The only thing I ever went to was a plant picnic one time. It was held at Purdy Lake.

C. McD: [Inaudible]?

R. McD: Well, that was later on. That was after . . .

With Firestone?

R. McD: Yeah, when Firestone was here. Yes, we attended . . . of course, we were more active with the Firestone [inaudible], but not during . . . the only thing during the war period, or that first period, before I went to Navy, I did go to a plant picnic at Purdy Lake.

How many people attended?

R. McD: A bunch. That's all I can say. I really don't know. The parking lot was jammed with cars and a place with . . . but it's not that big a park to start with, so.

Did you buy war bonds, [inaudible]?

R. McD: We bought war bonds, yes.

What did you use them for after the war?

R. McD: Partially to build that house next door, here, and . . .

Do you know if, in Windham, when they started building the Maple Grove housing, was there a lot of tension between people who had been here and the people who were moving [inaudible]?

R. McD: I have heard this, but as now, I don't . . . we don't socialize that much with the village people. But there was, I know, some, but I don't think it was . . . there was never anything organized or real resentful. I know when the war was over, in '45, that [inaudible] moved in there for a year or so till we built the house up here, because we couldn't get housing elsewhere after 1980. Some of the people made good use of the ground over there, the side corporation--[inaudible] mentioned--[inaudible] Goodman, Jim Purdy and some others, who hired a lot of that government land for development use, and Purdy [inaudible], donated to the Catholic church there and community center, and other than that, they had . . . but in the meantime, [inaudible] had moved the one south of 303, tore down [inaudible] college for dormitories, and those were never really occupied, that part, the part that was built south [inaudible] was tore down. It was never occupied during the operation of the plant. The ones on the north side, between 303 and the turnpike, yes.

You say Windham didn't really change very much, physically, besides that Maple Grove housing.

R. McD: Right.

Did the type of [inaudible] change?

R. McD: Harvison and Walker came in. There was no real businesses in Windham, as far as Harvison and Walker, brick plant, who's still there. There was small wood working shops, harness shops, which related to farm work and that. These went out of business everywhere, but a lot of people worked in the quarries at [inaudible], which is just out of the Windham Township, and the change . . . it will be oxygen process in the steel mill went to [inaudible] brick and eliminated the basic silica brick and so these people lost their jobs in the quarries and the quarries shut down, and they're still shut down. So that changed there, but this was after the arsenal was . . . I mean this was in the '50s, probably.

Do you remember any labor shortages? Now, I'm getting later on in the war, when you weren't there any more, but do you remember any labor shortages?

R. McD: I don't remember labor shortages. I know that they say at one time, in '42, in the fall during construction, there were something in the area of 30,000 people involved in construction, production and whatever, and I think in the--I've heard this--when Atlas went from cost plus to fixed fee, the thing went down something like 12 to 15 thousand, both sides of [inaudible] Ordinance Depot and Ravenna Ordinance together. I know at one time there was say 1,100 people in security, and it went way down, again, at that point. So I don't think there was ever a shortage of being able to get laborers. They brought them in from wherever.

When you went to the [inaudible] Ordinance Depot in late '42 . . .

R. McD: In July of '42.

You went you said on security?

R. McD: Yes.

So were you around when that explosion [inaudible] occurred?

R. McD: I was in Santa Fe, California when the igloo blew. I was in the Navy being transferred from San Diego up to Seattle. I picked up the newspaper . . . I was not there at the time. I'm familiar with the igloo. We've spent a lot of time there, haven't we? Out deer hunting and [inaudible]. But I was not there.

Do you know if a lot of women who lived in Windham worked in the plant, or did you know a lot of people who worked out there?

R. McD: I knew a lot of people who worked out there, yes.

For the women who worked out there, was it for the most part their first job, do you think?

R. McD: I would imagine their first industrial job, yes.

Do you think they liked it [inaudible]?

R. McD: I don't know they liked it. They liked the money. Liked the money. Like I said, in '37, when I started at Republic Steel, we started at 72 cents an hour, and that was a basic starting salary in the automotive industry, steel industry and anything else, and things hadn't changed that much from '37 to '42, and they started people at 90 cents an hour or better out there.

And you had more benefits, too, right?

R. McD: Yeah.

I'm going to ask you one last question. What do you think the main effect of the arsenal has been on the community? Has it been, for the most part, good, do you think?

R. McD: I think yes. I would say . . .

It provided a lot of jobs.

R. McD: *[Inaudible]*.

Well, thank you very much.

(End of Interview)

LORIS TROYER
November 2, 1995
Kent, Ohio
Rita Walsh, Interviewer

This is Rita Walsh of Gray and Pape of Cincinnati, Ohio, and I am conducting an interview on November 2, 1995, with Loris T. Troyer, who was with the [inaudible] Record Courier, has been for almost 60 years, and was daily at the Ravenna Plant, during its construction phase and knows quite a lot about the history of the area. He is a [inaudible] historian, as well as writing a weekly column with the paper. Would you tell me, Mr. Troyer, when you came to Ravenna and what you did here? I understand that you were born in Holmes County.

I was born in Holmes County, which is the Amish country of Ohio, a little town by the name of Walnut Creek. This is in the heart of the Amish country. And I came to [inaudible] in 1932 to attend Kent State University, and . . .

Did you get your degree in journalism?

No, they didn't have a full-fledged journalism school at that time. I studied foreign history. And then in 1936, while I was still a student, I began working part-time for the *Kent Courier Tribune*, which was affiliated with the *Ravenna Evening Record* at that time, and these were both owned by the big newspapers, which today is a pretty large chain of newspapers and television stations, that type of thing, cable stations, and lots and lots of weekly and daily papers. Then in 1939, I was transferred to Ravenna, where I served as a reporter and photographer, too. I covered the courthouse beat, the city hall beat and did general reporting, [inaudible] photography. We had a very small staff, (laughs), at that time. Then in (1938?), I was sent back here to Kent at what we called at that time, *The Kent Editor*. Then in 1963, I believe it was, I became the executive editor of the paper, which involved duties throughout the newspaper, the news side of the newspaper. And I divided my time between here and Ravenna, and even did some [inaudible] with some numbers of weekly papers that we had in the area. So and then I retired in 1982. The only thing I do today is write a local history column, which is published on Sunday, and I do that one day a week. I give a lot of talks on local history. In fact, I've got one next week.

What's it about?

Oh, I have to go down to the little town and talk to the AARP chapter, [inaudible]. I always talk to them about some phase of local history.

Tell me about finding out about the government buying the land from the Ravenna area. I understand you were the first person to hear about it.

Well, this was in August of 1940, and each day I went to work, I also dropped in on every office, of course. One of the offices that fairly not very often had any news was certainly *The Reporters* office, which was sort of just a functional office, it reports [inaudible], that sort of thing. But I had a good relationship with a kind reporter, whose name was Robert Barrett, and one morning, I walked in there and he said Loris, there's something happening here. And he led me into his office and he showed me several hundred papers that were options for land in eastern [inaudible] County. At that time, they were primarily in Paris Township, and I believe some were in Charlestown Township. And well, I asked who was taking up these options, who was taking the options, and he told me it was a company in Akron, a land and title company, [inaudible] Title Company. And he gave me the name of the president of this company, and I got on the phone and called him and asked what was going on, and he said, "Well, obviously, I'm not at liberty to tell you." I said,

"Well, we know you're taking up options for several thousand acres of land in eastern [inaudible] County. That's a pretty good concern to [inaudible] County residents and they want to know what for." And I said, "I happen to know that some of the land you're taking options on is owned by farmers, and they've been on this land ever since their original families settled it way back in the very, very early 1800s." And I asked him the question: I said, "Well, tell me this. Is this for the federal government?" And he said, "Yes." And that's really all I needed to know to write a story. But that was far as I got with that.

Did you know any of the people whose land was being optioned?

Yes, I did.

And they hadn't been told what the purpose [inaudible]?

No, they had not been told what the purpose of the land acquisition was. And for obvious reasons, well, it spread real fast, you know, and they wanted to get this land acquired, and of course, in August in 1940, of course, there were . . . well, the war drums were beating pretty loud, you know, and so everybody was pretty anxious about this. Then a few days later, the congressman in this area--I think his name was Dow (Harder?); he was from Akron--he announced that it was going to be for a munitions plant. With that, that was announced [inaudible] plant.

What do you think the general consensus was about such a plant being built around here?

Well, I think it was mixed. Obviously, it [inaudible] with a high rate of employment, and that was good because at that time, the economy in [inaudible] County was primarily agrarian. We had smaller manufacturing plants [inaudible], and so anything that would spur employment, from that standpoint, was, well . . . Ravenna is quite an old traditional town, settled in 1799, and the people, at that time, were quite traditional, and so from that standpoint, people thought, well, this is going to be a real change in our lifestyle. And it was.

So a lot of people went from farming to working in the plant?

That's correct, and they paid good wages, comparably, for that time. I wouldn't think so today. I remember that I had a friend who was the stringer for *The Beacon Journal* at Ravenna--I'd known him at Kent State--he worked for *The Beacon Journal*, and he left that job. He was my competitor on my beats, and he left that job and went up to the arsenal and got a job for 100 bucks a week, some kind of PR job. I think he put out publications . . . handled several publications [inaudible].

During the construction phase, as well?

Yeah, and afterwards. But anyway, I thought, "Golly, I could be making 100 bucks a week." And I don't know how much I was making at that time; probably about 50. But [inaudible] I could go out there and I could have a job for 100 bucks a week. My wife and I would be in real clover, you know. But that was . . . that's what happened. And then people began trooping in here from everywhere, from all over Ohio, as well as other states, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, lots of people came in here [inaudible].

I've heard people were here before they started writing out the contracts for construction. I read an article that . . .

That's true.

. . . instead of waiting around, the salesmen were here early on with to pick up certain materials [inaudible] the construction people and half the construction workers were here and some were panhandling beforehand is what I read.

I think that's probably true.

Did you live in Ravenna, at that time?

At that time, I lived in Ravenna. I didn't move back here till 1948. But it was, from an economic, social, cultural, the whole scheme of things changed in [inaudible] County.

Did you know the political goings on at that time? I understand that some people attribute the fact that the plant was made here had a lot to do with Congressman [inaudible] Fulton had a very large farm right in the center of the whole thing. Have you ever heard about that?

I've heard that, but I don't think that was the reason for its location here. I think the reason for its location here was the strategic transportation system. Had the B&O Railroad on the south border and the [inaudible] run on the north border.

And the fact that it was the closest [inaudible].

And Akron. There was a pool of labor here, which I saw 5,000 people strike out there one time, common laborers.

Was that during the production era?

[Inaudible].

[Inaudible].

Can't remember the month.

I know there was a pretty big strike here before the Pearl Harbor attack, where a lot of people went out for about a week. [Inaudible] overtime [inaudible].

M-hm.

[Inaudible]. But I know that Ravenna, for the most part, was not troubled too much by [inaudible], although [Inaudible] Walter told me that there were no unions in this area before that plant was built, [inaudible].

No, unions in the whole area, of any kind?

That's what he . . .

That's not true. We had a union [inaudible], we had a union at the Twin Coach Company in Kent, here. They made buses. And they had a union at the . . . what's now the Land Electric Company. It was that time Black and Decker. In fact, they had a big strike there back in the mid-30s, when strike breakers shot up the plant, the exterior of the plant. That's not right. There were unions. I will say this for the arsenal. The arsenal was really the father of the Common Laborers Union. There was a guy by the name of Kenneth, Kenneth Statmire, I think his name was, from Akron, that organized the Common Laborers Union at the Ravenna Arsenal.

That was what its name was?

M-hm.

And was it AFL or CIO or . . .

I can't tell you which one it was.

Because I know during construction, only AFL workers, members of that union, were allowed to work on Ravenna, strictly AFL. There was not a lot of CIO that could get in here.

They did strange . . . I heard [inaudible] that the union had an initiation fee for each new hire, so what they were doing was hiring in and--I can't tell you whether there was complicity for this or not--but then the guy would get hired and then he'd go back and stay in the line again and they'd collect the initiation fee both times. And that was one of the Cleveland newspapers sent a reporter--[inaudible] *The Cleveland Press* is now no longer in business--sent over a reporter in there, as a job applicant, and--this happened to me--and that was the exposé on that deal. It did happen. And at that time, when I was going out there each day to follow the construction, take pictures and all that sort of thing, I was also stringing for the *Legal Press* and for the *Youngstown* [inaudible]. Actually, all I did was send in copies of my stories that I ran in the *Record Courier* and copies of the pictures, and they would print them anyway, even if we had them earlier. But anyway, I made a little extra money that way.

Who took you around when you went up to the plant?

They had a PIO officer . . . that's another thing. At the beginning, it was very loose. Security was very loose. Nobody took me around. I went by myself. Anywhere I wanted to go, they just gave me a cardboard pass about that big that I'd put up in the windshield of my car and I went on my own.

What did it say, press?

Well, I don't know. It said *Record Courier* or something. I don't know. They gave it to me. And I went anywhere I wanted to go--took pictures of the construction and all that, stayed out of the way. I constantly was interviewing the commanding officer and his underlings, and they were very cooperative. They were very cooperative. They had a man, by the name of Captain Hillyer, who was the first man from the ordnance department here, the first military policeman here. In fact, Angelo (Seguro?), who was our editor at that time,--he's still living; [inaudible]--he and I pretty much were the staff at that time, and we went to see and interview Captain Hillyer at the old Ravenna Hotel, in Ravenna. I think it was on a Sunday evening, and just when he got to town. I don't know if he'd even been on the grounds, yet. And we interviewed him, the first officer here. The one commanding officer, a very cooperative man,--I just saw in that picture--Colonel (Chavin?), he was very, very cooperative. And I always got along very well with them and they did about everything I asked for, within limits. As for security, you know, they were very cooperative. In fact, they . . . you're talking about the Fulton farm. The Fulton mansion [inaudible] was in arsenal district, and they made an officer's club out of that. And they invited me to their parties [inaudible]. I went to Christmas parties in that officer's club. They invited me to a lot of parties. And employee parties, too. But I got along real well with them.

[Inaudible].

But with security getting tighter and tighter and tighter, and then, of course, after the operation started, as I remember, then you had to have the PIO officer accompany you, which was [inaudible]. I got along with [inaudible]. He had to have a little bit of sense [inaudible], and not try to push things that you know you're not permitted to do.

You remember what the construction workers were like, in general?

A rough and ready bunch.

Do you remember any particular ethnic groups [inaudible]?

A lot of Black. There were a lot of Black [inaudible], and in fact, that's not because they were Black, but we had a situation that was kind of a social problem. Right north of [inaudible] school, oh, [inaudible] 627, which was just south of the main construction gate, they had what was called a shanty town there, where they lived. They even had their own bar, all that sort of thing, which was terrible place, just a muddy mess. And there were a lot of fights [inaudible].

Do you know where the Blacks came from?

Mostly from Cleveland, I think. Probably some from Youngstown.

But from pretty local [inaudible]?

Yeah. A lot of time, they ran railroad trains to bring in workers from Youngstown and also from Akron, and they had a spur off of the Eerie Railroad, up in the north boundary of the arsenal, just a little bit east of [inaudible], and they'd bring in the construction workers and then get on the spur and take them right down to the arsenal. They had roads and railroads in the arsenal. Every time you went out there, they were building a new one. Either that or a road. Anyway, I covered an accident there in--I can't tell you the year now. I wrote a column about it [inaudible].

Still during the construction period, wasn't it?

Yes. The [inaudible] . . .

[Inaudible].

. . . '41 or 2. The construction went on quite a while, but anyway, I think about 7:00 in the morning--it was real cold. I still remember the day. It was March 15, and it was very chilly and I froze my ears. I was out there taking pictures early in the morning and the [inaudible] up on the railroad cars were overturned, and shot the scene and so forth, but just as I was leaving . . . at that time, you would need [inaudible] speed graphic cameras, you know, not these little 35 millimeters photographers use today, and you couldn't hide what you were doing, and you had to carry a suitcase with you to carry all the film holders with you. You took four or five film holders, and I had just got down off of one of these cars and was leaving. I was leaving the scene, because I had to get back. [Inaudible]. And I was accosted by a railroad [inaudible], and they were . . . railroad detectives at an accident scene were always very difficult to follow. And "Well, you can't take pictures here." "Okay, but I already have." He said, "Well, you're going to have to surrender your film to me." I said, "I don't surrender my film to anybody, even a policeman." And he said, "Well, you're on railroad property. I'll have to arrest you." I said, "Well, you'll have to arrest me, then." And but anyway, in the essence of saving time, I said, "Okay, here's the film," and I just reached in my suitcase and got out film holders and I just threw them to him on the ground. He didn't know it was unexposed film. And I went . . .

It was a bad accident?

Yeah, it was very bad. Marvelously, not many people were killed. I think there was only . . . there was one, I believe, one at the scene and one died later or something like that. I wrote a poem about it some years ago.

Did you [inaudible] at night? I know [inaudible].

That's right. I have been . . . I was there at night, but not often.

It's a little bit harder to photograph.

That's right. I was [inaudible] within the past year. Every year, we have here what is called Leadership [Inaudible]. This is a city program, but people will join into a class. And they're a very diversified group of people. Oh, it'd be young bank people and agency people, educators, everybody. And it's really to teach leadership and career advancement and that type of thing. But every year they take a bus trip throughout [Inaudible] County. In fact, the one this year was October 10. And each year, I go out on this bus trip and I sit up in the front with a mike in my face all day and describe all the landmarks and the history of the county and all that for the leadership group. Well, up until this year, we always went through the arsenal. This year, they wouldn't let us do it. But so I was in there about a year ago, on the last leadership trip, and to me, who remembers when this was just a beehive of activity, this was very depressing, and I think it would be to a person like Lloyd Glovers, who spent his whole working career there after World War II. But because there's just nothing going on.

[Inaudible].

I think the last report I had, there were 12 people out there. But it was an exciting period, but there were some problems and changes in lifestyle.

[Inaudible]?

Well, it was social.

Did people [inaudible]?

Yes, that's right, and the problems of housing people and we had three USO centers in the county, recreational needs. [Inaudible] Judge [inaudible], who was our [inaudible] judge. He was a real social [inaudible], and he organized a counsel--I forget now what it was called.

[Inaudible]?

Something like that. And I was involved in that, and this was all to bring people together and all that sort of thing.

[Inaudible] people [inaudible] and get to know people and the ones who stayed now are more [Inaudible] County residents than the original ones [inaudible]?

There are a lot of people in [Inaudible] County that came in here from other states, even during the arsenal period, who are still here and have raised their families. In fact, at that time, my wife and I lived in a apartment down on North [Inaudible] Street in Ravenna, and in another apartment in the same house, some couple came there from somewhere in Pennsylvania and they both worked at the arsenal. That man became the Ravenna police chief. Became the Ravenna Chief of Police. And is still around. In fact, [inaudible] one of my neighbors here. And that's just an example. There's, well, Carl Kafer. He was the commanding officer of the [Inaudible] Ordnance [inaudible]. There were two areas--Ravenna Ordnance Plant, [Inaudible], which was the west end in the Charleston area. And they took over the Fulton farm for their headquarters, [inaudible], the barn across the road from the mansion, they remodeled that into offices. He put all of his female help [inaudible] these uniforms, and military uniforms with [inaudible] caps, the whole

bit. Well, anyway, after he retired, he bought [inaudible] Main Street, and he also ran for Mayor after he retired. I think he came here as a warrant officer; in about two years, he was colonel.

What do you remember about how Ravenna changed physically during that period, [inaudible]? How did that change [inaudible]?

It didn't change a great deal.

[Inaudible].

There were offices, of course, for agencies and that type of thing, but they were pretty much [inaudible] old buildings. But the town looked . . . oh, the town looks a lot better today than it did then. It looks very much better [inaudible].

Do you remember any buildings [inaudible] knock buildings down [inaudible]?

I think they did create two or three parking lots. At that time, they had parking meters and [inaudible], but they . . . I think they did build a few more parking lots back at the Main Street building.

[Inaudible] the area outside of the downtown area?

Not really. Not really. I couldn't, because I was usually working. Worked a lot of nights. But it was quite a site. They paid on Friday, and checks were drawn on Second National Bank [inaudible], and that's the first time that I ever saw a bank open at night, and the workers would line up way down the street to get into a bank. Was that way everywhere. And, of course, the bars were full. The bars also cashed checks. They had a [inaudible] cashiers [inaudible] working for them in one bar, The Buckeye Bar, which is still there. They had a opening in the ceiling above the cashier's booth and a guy sat up there with a gun. What they did was they'd go to the bank and get huge amounts of money to cash checks. So it was kind of almost like an old West town. I remember during the rationing days that the word always spread around town, 'oh, the A&P has coffee today,' or something like that, and my wife would say, "Well, I've got to get up there to beat the arsenal workers."

[Inaudible] during the war? Not just [inaudible] but in general, the availability of food, [inaudible]? Sounds like, yes, it did.

Well, it would have changed anyway, but this just made it more interesting, I guess, you could say, because under rationing, there were always things that they were out of, you know, anything from cigarettes to coffee to meat, vegetables and fruit.

Did you have a car?

Did I have a car? Yes, I had a car back then. Gasoline rations. I got four gallons a week.

For both work and for personal use?

No, for personal use. It was something like ten for . . . I had a 'B' card. There was A, B, and C. The arsenal workers, most of them had C cards, the highest gallons, and I can't remember, but I believe the B card gave you ten gallons a week.

There was also, at least at the arsenal, there was a certain number of people with cars, where you could share a ride.

M-hm. A lot of car pooling. We had a lot of accidents, too, during the construction days. I covered a lot of accidents, out on old Route 5, which was during the arsenal days, the new Route 5 was built, but the old Route 5 was a narrow road and a very [inaudible] twisty. But there were a lot of cars going to the arsenal, going to work and coming home.

There were no lights [inaudible] at night [inaudible].

No, at any time, really. I knew I covered a lot of accidents out there. They ran a railroad spur from the B&O Railroad right up into the arsenal. That was to move stuff out of the depot site, in and out of there--shells and bombs and strategic materials in, I suppose. They built that spur; the government built the spur.

Did you cover that [inaudible] spur [inaudible]?

Yes, I did.

[Inaudible]?

I believe I heard about it from that PIO officer.

[Inaudible]?

I believe. I had a dreadful experience on that. There were 11 people killed. What had happened was they backed this truck up to an igloo. You know what an igloo is? Well, there are about 800 of them [inaudible] depot site. They're steel covered up with earth and then reenforced with concrete. That's where they stored the [inaudible]. And they backed this truck up to unload shells, to store them. Blew up. They found people from that truck clear up in (Windham?). And 11 guys were killed. But my dreadful experience with that was I got the list of fatalities from the guy, and that afternoon--that happened in the morning--and that afternoon, I was going around town, the ones that were local, to pickup photographs of them and whatever, you know, get a little background on them, and I left this one house, down on the north part of Ravenna, a street called Lincoln Avenue. I pulled in the driveway and I saw this lady out in her garden, so [inaudible] home of one of the people killed, and well, that's strange. I don't think she would be out there working in her garden, right, just knowing that her husband got killed in an explosion. So I immediately backed out; I didn't approach her. And I immediately backed out and I happened to know her son-in-law. He ran a butcher shop up town, and I went up there and talked to him, and they had not been notified. But that happened to me two or three times during World War II. Every day you're getting the casualty reports from [inaudible], by mail, and [inaudible] wounded, prisoners-of-war, whatever, and if we didn't have a photograph or something on file, of course, we'll go out to the family or try to pick up one. And that happened to me, I think, twice, that people hadn't been told. That's pretty traumatic.

[Inaudible].

With all the glitches, all the many, many instances that they had to handle, I guess you could expect a glitch now and then.

So what do you think is going to happen in the future here?

To the arsenal?

What affects has it had on Ravenna [inaudible]?

Well, in the last few years, every Chamber of Commerce leader and probably every Ravenna mayor and every politician [inaudible], county people, have really tried to get something into the arsenal [inaudible] to

help [inaudible] the economy a little bit, and nothing has ever succeeded. (Coughs). Excuse me. They talked at one time about a regional airport . . . [inaudible] materialized . . . and oh, there've been lots of ventures, the industrial parks and all that sort of thing. And nothing has ever materialized. Now, I read here not long ago, that the Ohio National Guard was going to take over part of it, or be allowed to take over part of it. Whether that materializes or not, I don't know. But that doesn't mean a great deal. That's happened before. We've had military training exercises out there for quite a few years.

It sure seems like whatever scheme you come up with, [inaudible] the cleanup.

M-hm.

That has to [inaudible].

That's right. There was this tremendous amount of cleanup and you don't even know, environmentally speaking, about the [inaudible] rounds out there, because after all, we had an ammonium nitrate plant out there and everything, and I do know that they used to have a place out there where they disposed of ammunition. You wonder about things like that. It's a very depressing place to go through. It's grown up in weeds and the buildings look so forlorn and lonely. There are a lot of buildings out there--over a thousand. It was quite an installation at one time--an old water plant, sewage disposal plant, everything.

It's hard to imagine that [Inaudible]. Someone who never saw it [inaudible].

They had a big open house out there one time. I can't tell you when this was, but it was . . . I think it was after World War II. They had a big open house. The public [inaudible] tours, which is the first time that ever happened.

[Inaudible].

I believe so. And my son, while Firestone was running that, my son--he was in charge of corporate public relations for Firestone at one time. When (Brigdestone?) bought it, he got let out. When the Japanese bought it. And he's in Chicago now. He's the public relations director for Midas Corporation. But anyway, he was involved in public relations when Firestone was a contractor out there.

[Inaudible].

Yeah, yeah, he made a lot of money there.

Well, we're just about at the end of the side, yeah.

The end of your tape. I don't know whether I've given you anything.

Oh, you've given me a tremendous amount, really. Thank you very much.

(End of Interview)

ROBERT WALTERS
November 1, 1995
Ravenna, Ohio
Rita Walsh, Interviewer

This is Rita Walsh of Gray and Pape of Cincinnati, Ohio, and I'm conducting an interview with Robert Walters of Ravenna, Ohio, on November 1, 1995, and I'm going to ask Mr. Walters a series of questions about the construction history of the plant, as well as the operating history of the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant. Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

I was living here in Ravenna, 220 Parkway, [inaudible], occupied by the Ravenna Fire Department.

That's right here, the center of town?

Right in the middle of town [inaudible].

Had you and your family lived there for a long time?

All our life.

And your father before that?

No, my father was born and raised in the Monroe County [inaudible].

Did you work or go to school then, at the time you heard about the plant?

When the plant was built, I was working at that time with Allen Aircraft Company.

And that's in Ravenna?

Here in Ravenna. That was 20 year ago [inaudible].

Can you describe the area at that time? What was Ravenna like in general? Mainly a farm community?

Well, yes, it was a farm community. We had, oh, seven or eight small river plants, we had the Cleveland [inaudible] mill, where they made [inaudible] clothing and they dyed the cloth [inaudible], made the cloth [inaudible], dyed it, shipped it to Cleveland to their sister plant, where suits and things were made. That was the largest [inaudible] plant there. Then we had A.C. Williams Company, which was a foundry, and they made tools, they made toys, they made Singer sewing machine heads. We had what was advertised and thought to be the largest balloon factory in our state.

Is that why all the balloons are on the signs around here?

They're no more. They're not in production anymore [inaudible] Rubber Company [inaudible] since gone out of state.

I knew there were a lot of farms around.

There was a lot of farms [inaudible].

Dairy farms?

Dairy farms.

What was the reaction of most people around here when they first heard about the government buying the land? Did they have a lot of rumors about what it was going to be?

Well, at first, there was a lot of secrecy. They didn't know why they were taking all these options. They didn't know the government [inaudible]. It had everyone guessing, all sorts of rumors of what was going to happen out there. In fact, our mayor had owned some land out there in that area, and glad to see something happened. He wasn't farming on it. [Inaudible].

[Inaudible] or . . .

How's that?

The swimming hole? What is the swimming hole? Is that where the reservoir was put in?

No, it's up in the north end there, where there was one area where a stream goes through that was dammed up and a nice swimming hole, and there was a boy scout camp up in there that . . .

Do you know if people's feelings about the development changed when they found out what was going to be built here, with all the preparation beginning for war and . . . ?

Well, there was mixed emotions, basically. I was working . . . as an example, I was working at Allen Aircraft where they were making [inaudible] fittings and things [inaudible] the aircraft for 35 cents an hour, and I was offered this job by a friend of mine out there for 50 cents an hour. So I grabbed it, and it soon went up to 60 to 65 to 85 [inaudible]. So it was good money, and they was all experiencing this. So they felt good from that aspect. But the town, some of them shops here [inaudible] were [inaudible] a lot of people, and running for the big money, so to speak, and [inaudible] people. It was bringing in the labor union in a hurry, which we never had around here, as I recall. The barbers union got real [inaudible]. They even blew up a barber shop because they wouldn't sign the union. So then there was some plus and minuses, and I think the pluses added up to be much greater.

And when you first worked at the plant, it was during construction period?

During construction.

And what were you doing?

[Inaudible].

And what were you doing for them?

I started out as a guard. They had 100 guards that they had hired. At that time, there was no fence or anything around the plant. It was an open area. They put a guard on each road leading into that area, to keep cars from going in [inaudible] into the area that had [inaudible]. And they had them patrolling inside, as well.

Which shift did you work on? All shifts?

I was working day shift to begin with, and then as jobs changed, why later, I was on the midnight shift, where they had about 5,000 employees hired. [Inaudible]. And the government come through with the regulation that everyone had to be finger printed. So they were fingerprinting on three shifts. And I'd go to work at midnight and I had . . . they set up a shanty with all the equipment in it and electric light [inaudible], and they would haul it, with a bulldozer, out to an area where there were a lot of men working and we'd have to go find that, fire it up, and fingerprint everyone that was working in that area. Then our job was good for the night.

I remember you telling me when they started fingerprinting, some people started leaving.

Oh, yeah. They found people that didn't want to be fingerprinted that just left. And I think that was the only good that come out of it. I don't think they made that much of a research on all those. [Inaudible] serve a purpose. We had an instance where a man come in and reported that there was a man out there working on the railroad that was wanted in [inaudible] for murder. He killed his wife with an axe. So he . . . it seems though that he got mad at this man because he was [inaudible] in a poker game with him that night, and he did some things that he didn't quite agree on, anyway. So he turned him in. So we did. We looked him up and went out and picked him up and turned him over [inaudible] County Sheriff Department.

And had he [inaudible]?

[Inaudible].

Wow, there's a lesson to be learned. When you worked out there during the construction period, did you drive out there by yourself?

No, we had another fellow here in town I rode with. He [inaudible] a fellow that had worked with [inaudible] on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. [Inaudible] had just finished the tunnel project on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and come to Ravenna to start this job and transferred over here to Ravenna. And he was living here in town, and he had been hired, oh, as a sergeant supervisor [inaudible] and living here in town, and we rode together into town [inaudible].

And you ate at a cafeteria or at the [inaudible]?

We ate there at the cafeteria [inaudible]. Later after . . . they had built their own [inaudible], really for the benefit of the people living in the dormitory. But we had privileges, [inaudible] up there, [inaudible].

Do you know if most of the people who worked in the construction crews, if they lived in the town or--because I know the dormitory situation was pretty limited--did those people lived here in Ravenna [inaudible]?

A lot of them. See, a lot of people came from everywhere. A lot of people here in town are renting rooms, extra rooms. I think that my mother-in-law and brother-in-law, as well, had converted their garage into a living quarters and had rented out an extra room in their house. And they were doing that all over town, but they were bringing workers in by train, from Youngstown, and another train from the west, from Akron, and a lot of people driving, with riders. They would often be full. The cars would be full.

What about the rent in town, as far as these rooms? Would they get pretty ridiculous? People sort of [inaudible] . . .

How much they were paying, I don't know, but, yes, they went sky high.

[Inaudible]. Do you know if there was a work camp at all, or was the housing sort of dormitories for the workers on-site and then rooms in Ravenna and other people just commuted? Don't know of any work camps or anything like that?

Well, yes, there was . . . well, basically, just south of the main entrance, *[inaudible]* railroad track, there was probably some of them, of . . . shacks that went up in a hurry, as well as a bar.

What was the bar called? Do you remember?

No, I don't recall, but I've been in there. I had to . . . the *[inaudible]* marshal sent me in there to request the owner to come see him, and it was just built on the ground. You walk inside and you're in mud, you know, and he had an old bar like you would see in the movies, with half of the mirror broken off, you know, the back bar. And on a pay day, on a pay day, there would be about three house trailers full up in front of this bar, where this bar was near this shanty town they called it, I think. And they would be women there looking to make some extra money on pay day. And Monday night they would leave. Friday, they'll be back.

I hear the bars in town were the major banks for a lot of people on Friday nights.

Oh, yes. The local banks, or the local bars were all cashing--they were lined up, cashing pay checks, and they would keep the odd penny. That's what *[inaudible]* to were, and most of the money, I think, was spent in their bars, too. There was one bar, particular, that was *[inaudible]* so much money he had a guard up above the pay window, up above there watching down with a shotgun over his lap, and never . . . I don't recall of ever any of the bars having any problem that way *[inaudible]*. *[Inaudible]*.

What kind of people do you remember coming into town? I know a lot of local people worked out there, but remember any particular ethnic groups or Black people coming in?

I can't say we had any problems that way at all, no. People from all over. I was in the army and I met thousands of people but I never found one that would recognize . . . you know, 'where you from,' 'I'm from Ravenna.' 'Out there at the arsenal,' 'Yeah.' Oh, yeah, they knew the arsenal. They didn't know Ravenna. And I was introduced to the colonel of the, a commanding officer, a colonel, of the highway patrol, down in Columbus. One of the patrolmen here took me to the graduation class and I met him, and 'oh, yeah, I worked load line one.' (Laughs). There were people from all over.

Besides drinking, what did construction workers do for entertainment, that you know of? Did they participate in sports or . . . ?

Oh, they had *[inaudible]* the employees out there. They had a ball diamond and they had a bowling alley built out there, where they had bowling. They had off from the cafeteria, they had *[inaudible]* a large pool hall, with pool tables, several pool tables, and card tables, and things of that *[inaudible]*.

And that was mainly for the people who were living on site?

Living on the *[inaudible]*, yeah.

*But there were some other places around town *[inaudible]* people to do?*

Yes, they opened up like a USO and things here in town, you know, at the . . . I understand they were at the National Guard *[inaudible]* they had dances *[inaudible]*.

How was the pay at the plant, during construction? You said it went up pretty rapidly.

Yes, well they had the hiring rate, and then sort of a probationary period, and then it went up, and . . .

Were there other benefits, as well as the pay, [inaudible] insurance?

Well, they didn't have any benefits at all. In our department, in the security department, they furnished all our clothing, which is a benefit.

What was the uniform like? [Inaudible]?

They patterned it just after the highway patrol. They went down to Columbus buying it from the same clothier that furnished the highway patrol. In fact, our [inaudible] Highway Patrol and that makes a difference.

Now, that I've talked to you about production era, after the plant finally opened and started loading shells and bombs . . . so you were working there during the construction period. How soon before the production era started did you know that you had a job beyond that time?

I was hired by Atlas Powder . . .

From the very beginning?

It was in '41, when they were starting to load line one. I was interviewed and accepted, and then they come and told me that the [inaudible] asked for me. He said [inaudible]. They were going to move, [inaudible] was moving over to POD's side, [inaudible] Ordnance [inaudible], and he was going over there and starting to get . . . the guy [inaudible] wanted me to come with him. So the young man from Atlas come and told me that that's what he had asked for. [Inaudible] so I figured I think that's pretty nice [inaudible]. So I went over with him. Which I'm glad. I was over there about six months and they opened up a fire department over there, and I was chosen [inaudible] chief [inaudible] fire department. I had a year's service on Ravenna fire department, and during that time, I took training with the captain of the Akron fire department and then came over [inaudible] training every Tuesday night for something like a month, and we had training from the Ohio Inspection Bureau, so I . . . and my dad had been a fireman. He retired and he was a fireman for 40 years, [inaudible]. So I live on the right side of the fire station all my life. I was born in the fire station in Ravenna. So it was in my blood.

I'm not going to ask you the next question, which was why did you work there and do what you did? So you worked at the [inaudible] Ordnance Depot for a time, but you also worked at the Ordnance Plant, right? Or were you on the fire department of the [inaudible] Ordnance Depot first?

Yes. I went over in the guard department. Well, the assistant chief of the guard became a fire chief, and he took me over and I was First Assistant in the fire department. So I was there six months, when we got the department organized, and I was running [inaudible] on operating pumps and [inaudible]. But anyway I decided to enlist in the [inaudible], and I left. It was [inaudible] civil service fighter over there. When they organized the fire department, when he left [inaudible] and became Civil Service War Department and [inaudible] fire department, [inaudible]. I had six months in the Civil Service, and when I quit and went into the service,--I enlisted in the service. So when I came back in October, '45, they told me to come back the first of November, that Atlas Powder was leaving and the war department was taking over and they would take me back. Having a veteran [inaudible], they would take me back.

When did you enlist? When did you go into the army?

I went in June, '42.

Was your work stressful? During the World War II period, when you worked at the plant, did you find your work stressful? Were there very many emergencies?

When I came back, I denied taking my veteran's [inaudible] of being assistant chief. I had that option, starting in as assistant chief. And I denied that, [inaudible] too much change made in the installation since I left, [inaudible] that I start in as a fireman. I started out at the bottom, [inaudible] fire fighter. And later, they called me, said that they wanted me to come up to the personnel office; that they had sent to St. Louis and got my previous Civil Service records, and by that time, I had a lot of [inaudible] coming, which included the three years I was in the Army. So they said you're going to be making more than [inaudible], so you're not permitted to [inaudible]. [Inaudible].

Before you enlisted, in '42, when was that explosion? So you weren't here when that big explosion occurred?

That explosion was in '43. I had come home on leave and the fellows were telling me all about it, and the peculiar thing that I found, according to the igloo that blew up was east of the fire station at POD, east and north, and the front door was facing east. And igloos are built so that the explosion, if they detonate, would blow out the front door. Well, when it exploded, it broke windows in Newton Falls, Windham, all through the [inaudible], [inaudible]. They were looking all over; they know something blew up, and they never even heard it at POD. They were finally called up. The fire department was called to report in a grass fire up in that area. So they went up there to the grass fire and found out an igloo had blown up.

That was the only big explosion wasn't it?

They was 11 killed and there was fragmentation found.

[Inaudible]?

They were made and they were put together six in a package, and when they blowed, they was a terrific amount of fragmentation. [Inaudible] six.

And no one ever really found out what actually happened. They couldn't, because the igloo evaporated, right? There wasn't anything left of it for . . . ?

Well, they have a good suspicion. They said they was having trouble with that particular fuse of somehow it would set itself off, where if it was jarred it would detonate it. And they feel it was a rough [inaudible] that they had, the way of putting them in the truck and all, moving them, that caused [inaudible]. That was their theory as what caused it. But then they, after that, after that, they had changed some of their [inaudible], some of the workings of that type of fuse, because they knew they had a problem with it.

Do you remember the company magazine, the newsletter, put out by Atlas? Did you get one of those, as an employee?

The *ROP Magazine*, I never was an employee of them, so I never got that. However, my brother was a photographer in charge of the photo lab for Atlas Powder all during their [inaudible], so he had a large supply of them, which I have then inherited.

[Inaudible]. Do you remember the pay at the plant? Now, I know you were there in the early part, so you may not be able to answer this, but do you remember the pay at the plant being the same for men and women, or do you think there was a different pay?

I have no idea. I tell you, when I came back from the army and started in the fire department at Civil Service, at \$2019 a year.

Is that good?

It was pretty good, then. But to think of it now.

How did people get along, people in the town get along with the people who were coming in? Do you remember that? [Inaudible] pretty well?

I never heard of any problem in that [inaudible].

And were there a lot more things to do, as far as entertainment during that period? Because so many people coming in who never . . .

Well, I don't know. Not through my period, because the three years I left in the army, was when they were really busy out here. But my wife tells me, yes, they had USO's all over and dances [inaudible] Keystone over there, and some of the women from over here would go clear over there to Keystone to the USO, because there was an army base, [inaudible], Kentucky, right there. Yeah--no, I don't know what I'm . . . there was an army camp not too far from there that would come to this USO and it was a way to meet . . . yeah.

Do you remember, before you left to the Army, do you remember curfews for anyone?

[Inaudible].

Do you know of anyone who disliked the plant because it was loading shells and bombs? Was there much opposition for that around here or did most people . . .

Not during that era. Yeah, I think that did arise during the Vietnam era, which I was involved in the security department [inaudible]. The colleges. We had [inaudible] College and Kent State that would come out and would sign and display them out like on a picket, but they would notify the news media before they came out that they were going to be out there. Then go out there, and when they got their picture taken (laughs) by the news media, they'd leave. They never presented any problem.

Did many women work at the plant?

Oh, a lot of women. I mean during the war they [inaudible] a lot of women. In the fuse and booster area, they had all jobs [inaudible] that was . . . a lot of women. They was made for women with small hands working with [inaudible] and things [inaudible] element.

And you think most of them, this was probably their first job?

Yeah. Of course, they had women driving trucks and everything else, but they was a lot of women up there in that area that mainly [inaudible].

Any women in the fire department?

No.

What happened to the people who lost their jobs at the end of the war? What happened to Ravenna? When you came back, the plant was just closing down. What was happening in the town? Were a lot of people packing up and leaving, was there an air of something shutting down everywhere? [Inaudible]?

No, it stayed calm. No confusion at all. No. I think they were darn glad the war was over.

How did the community change after the war ended [inaudible]?

[Inaudible]. We still had quite a few employees out there. All this ammunition that they had sent over to, a lot of that was coming back. They had, they still [inaudible] ammunition [inaudible], they had to [inaudible] outside between [inaudible]. That all had to be reworked before it could be . . . anything that was going on, it had to be brought back and all reworked before they could put it back into storage [inaudible], and [inaudible].

And the industries that had been here before the war, did they hang on after the war? Were they still here, or did they [inaudible], all those rubber plants you talked about?

They still stayed. The only thing that I recall that really closed up was the [inaudible] mill and the dye house. I don't know as whether you can blame that on them or not, because they made the [inaudible] in Cleveland, [inaudible], and they didn't get [inaudible]. However they were affected caused the dye house and the [inaudible] mill to close up.

What about housing in the area? A lot of new subdivisions open up right after the war or during the war?

Well, I actually don't recall.

Was it a little bit later, then, in the '50s?

Yeah. It was more [inaudible].

Well, I think we're to the end of our interview, then.

Well, fine.

Thank you very much.

(End of Interview)

APPENDIX A
RELEASE FORMS

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Estella Babb Pavlick Decker

Address: 417 Madison Ave
Ravenna, Ohio 44266

Phone: _____

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of Historic Engineering Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5-18-96

Interviewee(s)
Signature(s)

Estella Babb Pavlick Decker

Date _____

Interviewer
Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Joe DiMauro
Address: 395 Silver Oaks Drive, #7
Kent, Ohio 44240
Phone: (330) 673-7560

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers History Office, Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5-17-96 Interviewee(s) Signature(s) Joseph J. DiMauro

Date _____ Interviewer Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Ray McDaniel
Address: 8978 Stanley Road
Windham, Ohio 44288
Phone: _____

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
History Office*

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5-18-96

Interviewee(s)
Signature(s)

Ray McDaniel

Date _____

Interviewer
Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Loris Troyer

Address: 1167 Norwood Street
Kent, Ohio 44240

Phone: 230-673-7374

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5-19-96 Interviewee(s) Signature(s) Loris Q. Troyer

Date _____ Interviewer Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Robert Walters
Address: 708 Maple
Ravenna, Ohio 44266
Phone: _____

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 18 May 96

Interviewee(s)
Signature(s) Robert Walters

Date _____

Interviewer
Signature _____